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SEFTON MARSHALL | GC3 OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

TAKE A RISK ...

WHO IS YOUR 'HERO OF FAITH'? WHO STANDS OUT IN YOUR MIND AS SOMEONE WHO TOOK A RISK WITH GOD?

As a little boy, I loved hearing the stories of Abraham, Joseph, David, Daniel, Peter, Paul, ... the list goes on. Growing up, these men were my heroes. And they still are I must add! And if I had been a little girl, I am sure my heart and mind would have deeply impacted by the stories of Esther, Sarah, Hannah, Dorcas and the like. In these stories we encounter real-life people who, in their pursuit of God, took huge risks. For some it was reputation, for others their very life!

When getting a little older, I heard of what

five American men had done in attempting to take the gospel message to the Auca Indians, a tribe deep in the Amazon rainforest with a fear inspiring reputation. At that point, these people had never been contacted by the outside world, so it was an amazing gospel opportunity. These five godly men meticulously planned and executed the flying of their plane to build a relationship and trust with the people of this notorious tribe. They took huge risks. They paid the ultimate price! ('Through Gates of Splendour' and 'Jungle Pilot' tell the impacting story.)

Fast forward to today. Grab a copy of our Daily Prayer Guide, for in there we have 117 listings of people who have taken a risk for God. Some live in isolated areas, having infrequent contact with other English-speaking people. Many live in what we call 'Restricted Access Countries' where they are under constant threat of persecution, expulsion from the country, and even potential violence and death. The people listed in our DPG are my heroes of faith too. Their desire to share the 'Good News of Jesus' has taken them from the comforts of New Zealand to the place God has called them to. I salute their obedience. I'm amazed by their sacrifice. They all have their ►

unique inspiring personal story to tell of God's goodness and faithfulness. I know, because I get to hear many of them regularly. Why not contact one of them and build a relationship so you can be inspired as well? Or follow their stories on our social media posts.¹ Who knows how God might use them to motivate and encourage you to take a risk for Him!

God's call to us all, His people, is to step out of our comfort zones, to share our faith in an attractive way by what we say and how we live. Whether that is 'here' or 'there'. Jesus instructed His followers to 'Go!', to leave their familiar surroundings, their trade in everyday life, their means

of income, their friends and family, all that was at the core of their security. We're called to take a risk; to put our dependency solely on Him.

But, and it is a big 'BUT', I am reminded He provides the resources. In our stepping out, let's have God's words, 'Fear not', ring loudly in our ears. This phrase is peppered throughout our Bibles for that reason. Remember, Jehovah God has promised to be our shield and strength, 'our very present help in times of trouble' (Psa 46:1). Claim the certainty of 'I am with you always' (Matt 28:20), knowing 'always' means always! Rest in 'His compassions never fail. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness'. (Lam 3:23) Know we are on the winning

side, 'more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom 8:37).

Take the risk ... knowing that if He's called, He will provide!

This Christmas-time, let's consider all God provided through Jesus coming to earth. How are you going to tell others of His love? How will you introduce them to Jesus so they too can experience the hope, joy, peace and freedom that comes from an encounter with Him?

The Board and all those at GC3 trust your Christmas will be very special for you, and pray you'll have courage to take a risk to share the story of God in your life as you celebrate the coming of Jesus to be the Saviour of our world. ■

¹ Check out <https://www.facebook.com/gc3nz/> and <https://gc3.org.nz/resources/>

JOHN DE JONG

FAITH CROSSING BOUNDARIES

THIS IS THE SIXTH AND FINAL OF MY SERIES IN *GC3 CONNECT* FOR 2019. IN THIS SERIES I HAVE BRIEFLY ADDRESSED CHRISTIAN MISSION IN A CHANGING WORLD.

I first looked at how the world has changed in less than one hundred years, with more Christians now living in the traditional "mission fields" of the Majority World than in the European/Western nations that sent missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The most fruitful intercultural missionary work is now carried out by Christians in those places and requires the church of the Western world to consider how we can join in with what God is doing in the world today. But my second article addressed a barrier to doing this—money. The problem is not that there is insufficient money, but that the world's wealth is disproportionately held in the Western world. Although we are equals in Christ, we are separated from our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world by our wealth and privilege. Careful thought is needed in missions' situations to navigate issues of power and dependency, arrogance and resentment. My third instalment looked at a pre-requisite to genuine missionary work in another culture, which is becoming immersed in that culture. This immersion is not simply so that we can understand the culture we are going to, it is also so that we

can understand our own culture and thus be in a position to not impose our cultural traditions upon others as though they were the Gospel. This led to my fourth instalment, "Partnership in Mission." Partnership in the Gospel is a partnership of equals, in which the gifts, including the gift of cultures, each party brings are recognised and valued. But partnership is threatened when we one party insists that their own cultural ways of doing things are superior. This is the very thing that Paul recognised as "not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14). My fifth contribution looked at how this new situation of global Christianity means that mission is now from everywhere to everywhere, which is where I want to pick up from to finish this article and series.

Christianity faith is intrinsically related to culture because through Jesus, God himself entered into a particular culture at a particular time. Yet although God became incarnate within the culture of first century Palestinian Judaism, even within the brief time narrated in the New Testament the Gospel crossed into new cultures (Acts 10-11). The Jewish-Christian leaders of the church came to realise that the Gospel of Jesus



John is married to Rebecca. They both grew up in West Auckland and met at Lincoln Road Bible Chapel, which is still their home church. In 2005 they moved to Yangon, Myanmar, to work with the church there. They took Adam (two-and-a-half years old) and Grace (10 months) with them. Sarah and Charlotte were born over there. John taught Old Testament and Hebrew at the Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST), along with preaching and teaching in the local church. Rebecca was involved in women's and children's ministry, as well as home schooling the children. They returned to Auckland to live in October 2017, and John has found work lecturing in Biblical and Intercultural studies at Laidlaw College, based at the Henderson campus.

Christ is not confined to any single culture (Acts 15:1-21). But not only does the Gospel enter into different cultures, it flourishes in this intercultural encounter. It is as Gospel crosses cultural boundaries that it most dynamic, and the church grows. As Scott Sunquist writes, ▶

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the Jesus movement thrives on the borderlands, where cultures overlap and encounter one another...the apostolic nature of Christianity is part of its essence. Another way of stating this is that Christianity atrophies without missionary expression... When the faith is crossing

boundaries—geographically, linguistically, economically, culturally—it is most alive. When it is not doing so, or when it is not at least trying to do so, it is in decline.¹

We live in an amazing time, the age of global Christianity, but it is an age in which the white, western church finds

itself a declining minority. Mission is the lifeline and means by which our churches can be reinvigorated and reenergised, as we engage in both global mission and intercultural mission within our own post-Christian Aotearoa-New Zealand society. ■

¹ Scott Sunquist, *The Unexpected Christian Century: The Reversal and Transformation of Global Christianity, 1900-2000* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 184.



TIM & ANGELA | DAY 18, GC3 DAILY PRAYER GUIDE

REFLECTING ON MISSION FROM A VERY MIDDLE EASTERN TALE

WALKING IN THE CENTRE OF OUR TOWN ONE EVENING, WE LOST OUR WALLET. IT HAD A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF MONEY IN IT. WE LIVE IN A TOWN OF AROUND 60,000 PEOPLE. WE HAD BEEN IN THE COUNTRY FOR THREE MONTHS BY THIS STAGE. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED NEXT...

Three days later, I miss a phone call from Omar, a Christian acquaintance who lives not far from us. I receive a message from him to get in touch about 'something important to (me)'. The other few times I have seen Omar around

town, he asked me how the Arabic is going, and wanted to help. He invited me previously to come and drink tea in his home and talk Arabic so I assume his new message is along these lines. He rings again a few hours later, and I ►



answer. He asks me straight away, 'Tim, have you lost something?' I say that I have, that I have lost a small duzdaan (wallet) in town, it was on Saturday evening, and he mentions something – his detail is cryptic – about something being found with a receipt inside. It was a receipt from the small dukaan (grocer) next to his house where he and I had talked together five or six days earlier. He says I should come and meet him there.

"Ok, thanks Omar. I will be there in ten minutes, insha'Allah"

I walk up the hill in the drizzle, the only rain since that first shower of the season four weeks ago. Fifteen minutes later, we meet at the store. He introduces me to Hamsa, the owner's son and an employee of the store. Omar explains to me that a woman had found the wallet and that she is on her way to meet us here.

Moments pass. Omar, Hamsa and I exchange a few sentences in my broken Arabic. Our angel with the wallet arrives and looks at me with half an inquiring

look. Perhaps she is surprised because I am a foreigner, one of the few in our town. Jane is from Madaba but she is proficient with English and she isn't covered. Two rarities in our town.

She asks me about the lost purse and then tells me that she lives in town and that even though she never walks to church...on Saturday night she walked to church. She found the purse on the ground outside the bag shop. She opened the purse and found that there was only money inside. But when she opened it again, she noticed that there was a small docket inside with the header DUKAAN LIMON. She made her way across town, called by the store, and spoke with Hamsa.

"Is there anyway you could find out who this docket belongs to? I want to return this purse to the owner." The two collaborators – one Muslim and the other Christian go to work, trying to piece together who might own this wallet.

Hamsa spends hours that evening scanning the CCTV footage from the store cameras. The CCTV 'clock' was

not set to the right time so he had to troll through the whole reel to find the right moment. When he found the right footage on the video stream, he could see through the hazey picture that it was me standing there at the counter with the same red wallet that was in Jane's hand now in front of him. Once he had replayed the footage over and over, Hamsa remembered that he had seen me talking with Omar outside the store on the previous Friday. Because Omar lived next door to the store, he went straight to see him and asked if he had any way of contacting me. Omar had my number and called me. This was the phone call I missed earlier that morning.

Jane continues. She asks me how much money was in the purse. She nods when I tell her, and hands me the wallet. I don't know yet whether some or all of the money will be in there...

It is all there.

She has hardly stopped smiling since she walked in the door. I am happy and grateful and disbelieving at the same time. The unlikely series of events, the unambiguous intent of our new friend, the resolve of Hamsa to help, the smallness of the docket. Omar comments that this docket is more valuable than the money, because without the docket there would be no money. This is typical of his ponderings.

I don't have the Arabic to express my gratitude and disbelief to these three conspirers. But my hand is on my chest, and I am happy to be here for these brief moments and acknowledge their kindness. I tell Jane that my Syrian friend and I spent three hours at the police station on Sunday. I said to him then, 'Khallaas, its lost'. He said, 'in New Zealand, it would be lost, but in the Middle East, sometimes these things find their way back to you'. Jane smiles again.

I leave the dukaan with Omar. It is raining more heavily now. I go to put up my umbrella so that I can walk home but Omar interrupts me and tells me he needs to drive into town. 'I will drop you on my way.' We make the drive home, Omar commenting that 'she never walks, but God told her to walk to find your purse'. When we've pulled up outside our apartment, I invite him in to drink coffee but his daughter is visiting today with his granddaughter so he will return home to see them. I'm glad he knows where we live now. He turns and ►





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drives inconspicuously in the opposite direction from town, back towards his home. I notice.

I am awake today. This has been my part to play, a small one next to the chief actors in this story – but a crucial one.

I arrive home and throw the purse on the couch next to where Angela and Louis are sitting. Angela looks inside, amazed, and I recount the details. We marvel at it again.

Because he had been there when we lost the wallet, Angela messages our Syrian friend to tell him the news. He is amazed and he replies immediately: “Eleven minutes ago I was sitting here thinking to myself: they must have found the purse.” This comment is strange, but it’s not unusual in this story. It fits like a glove.

We have our purse back but there are details in the day which are more important still than the dinar being returned. What should I pay attention to in these details? Is this the narration over the story?:

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,

and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater,

“so is my word that goes out from
my mouth:

It will not return to me empty.¹

But I’m left with the question: was it for
250 dinar? What else did you sow today?

Elsewhere in Isaiah, we’re reminded:

“Who did this? Who made it happen?
Who always gets things started?
I did. God. I’m the first on the scene.
I’m also the last to leave.

Did anyone tell me that this might
happen?

No one mentioned it, no one
announced it.

No one knows what’s going on.²

This story is one among numerous
experiences that have taught us about
seeing what God is already doing in
a place. Perceiving that he is present,
that the context we have arrived in is
full of ‘good and perfect gifts’. Plenty of
things that are broken and in need of
shalom, plenty of things that are rich and
wonderful. Not simply one or the other.

We can relax in his presence and partner
with him. We do not need to see ourselves
as bringing with us ‘the goodness’, ‘no
he brings the goodness to us’ (Romans
12:3). Where initially we thought perhaps
that this story was about us getting our
money back, it became plainly obvious
that it was about things far more
significant than that.

We had made several new friends. We
returned a few days later with a small gift
for Hamsa to express our appreciation.
He didn’t even seem to see his actions
as outstanding, just a normal thing to
do. Within a week, we had been invited to
visit Jane and her husband (a high court
judge in the capital).

By being in a position of dependence
and in debt to these new friends of ours,
we were far more likely to build bridges
and connections than if we had come as
the ‘top dog’.

It’s also part of our education – to learn that
the world has grace in it. Not perpetual
prosperity but the encouragement to live
by a different script than the one that
says: ‘everything is scarce, fight your
corner, get to the top’.

Look. It rains (Matt 5:45). ■

¹ Isaiah 55 (NRSV)

² Isaiah 41 (MSG). There seems a relevant reflection here that when our God is no longer able to surprise us, he is no longer God.



ALISTAIR & LINDA | DAY 28, GC3 DAILY PRAYER GUIDE

MINISTERING TO THE MILITARY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

IT WAS OVER 10 YEARS AGO THAT MY WIFE AND I WERE AMBUSHED BY GOD AND EVICTED FROM OUR COMFORTABLE LIVES ON A GOVERNMENT SALARY WITH THE MILITARY, TO REACH BACK INTO MILITARY COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION. IT HASN'T BEEN ALL SMOOTH SAILING, BUT WE ARE THANKFUL THAT HE INTERRUPTED US!

Our basic ministry strategy starts with finding ways to serve military personnel and their families, without an agenda. As we do that and trust builds, we look for opportunities to *share* our faith (1 Peter 3:15). The Holy Spirit *wins* people to Jesus, so the winning is something we pray about and truly desire to be a part of, but we don't ever want to do anything that forces a response. Any kind of coercive evangelism risks our relationship with the community we are trying to help, and it risks someone faking their choosing to follow Jesus. We commit to *building* those who do follow Jesus in their faith, equipping them with the focus of sending them to serve others and continue the cycle. This strategy of *serve-share-win-build-send* has become the cornerstone of our ministry.

Serving is the largest part of the ministry, and it starts with getting to know

what needs are out there. There is a temptation to "serve" by delivering a solution to one of our own problems without knowing if it is a problem for those we are serving. Giving someone something that they don't need isn't serving, so we spend a lot of time asking, "What would help look like for you?"

In one country I was asked to teach on Strategic Leadership to a group of combat experienced and hardened military personnel. I prepared the seminar and two weeks out, their boss, a two-star General, decided that the seminar should be on Ethical Leadership. I was annoyed, but after praying and taking counsel from my wife, I calmed down and wrote an Ethical Leadership workshop in a week. It was what they needed, so it really made no sense to bring anything else. I got to speak to 100 personnel, most of whom came from a combat zone to attend the



workshop and most of whom had some blood on their hands, not all of it ethical. Over two days the discussion naturally led to the Bible as offering the only reliable ethical standard that never changes. The General, in his closing remarks, admitted that he was not an ethical man, but wished that someone had taught him those things when he was a young officer. I got to share the Gospel with the sergeant who drove me around. When we serve without an agenda, focused on meeting real needs and riding through frustration, God does things and we get to see.

While serving, we look for natural opportunities to *share*. Sharing needs to come naturally, especially in a military environment where we are sensitive to coercion of any kind. If we genuinely care about the people we want to share with, we will be patient. If we ▶

push it (I'm not saying, don't boldly take opportunities, just don't brashly try to force opportunities), people can smell our insincerity. They begin to feel like desired trophies and not people whom we have a genuine care for. Relax, let the Holy Spirit lead the conversation and when the time is right, He will give you a nudge.

I had a chance encounter with the Commander of the Air Force in one country, who happened to be coming to New Zealand for a conference. In his country it was illegal to talk about any religion except the state religion on government property, so the local ministry team had to be patient and respectful to be allowed to serve their military personnel. The Commander came to dinner at our house, where there are no restrictions on what religion we could discuss, but I was still patient and respectful (and a little nervous). Then he asked, "I love how your organisation helps us, but why do you do it?" There followed a two-hour inter-active unpacking of the Gospel. The Commander didn't make a decision while he was with us, but the last time I saw him he told me that he was talking to others who believed what I believe.

Which brings me to *winning*. Winning is the business of God. No person ever convicted another person to follow Jesus, only the Holy Spirit does that, so again, we can relax. I'm a little uncomfortable even with saying that I led someone to faith. The way I would describe it is that God has invites us into His process of people getting saved. I am a privileged guest in a process that does not rely on my input, and that is freeing. If we truly relax and leave the winning to the Holy Spirit, we can naturally share our faith without any fear or burden of worrying about messing it up. We can't mess up winning someone to Jesus because we are not responsible for the winning.

I'm also not sure that we can tell from one prayer if someone is saved or not. In Cambodia I was talking to a man whose organisation was a sharing machine. He told me that they don't count anyone as saved until they have been disciplined for two years. Only then, he had learned from experience, could there be some certainty around the sincerity of their decision.

This makes *building* a critical step in all ministries. It is when we build others in their faith that those simple truths take hold and the deep roots grow. Even better, well disciplined people take ►



up their own ministries and gain their own momentum, creating a cascading and multiplying effect that goes way beyond just us sharing our faith and seeing people saved. Discipleship builds understanding and it anchors people in a deepening relationship with God that can't help but lead people to want to serve God and their fellow human beings well. When we don't take time (and it does take time) to build people, we can doom them to error and mediocrity, if not failure.

We're happy to build into anyone, but we are especially looking for trustworthy people (2 Timothy 2:2) to work with, people who we help to *send* to serve others. They are energising to work with. One couple we work through in Asia followed this pathway: from discipleship conversations around marriage, to positive changes in their own marriage, to marriage training, to more positive changes in their marriage and passing what they learned onto others, to training those others to run marriage training, to an indigenous marriage ministry. It's not perfect but we love investing in people who want to be built into and use what we pass on, but better still, don't ask before passing it onto others.

This is the key – the effectiveness of discipleship is seen in replication. Our goal is to disciple people with a vision to disciple others, in other words, we want to be a part of sending people to help *serve, share, win, build and send* others. ■



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